

Istanbul Statement of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures

The Istanbul Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures took place from 7 to 9 June 1999, under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Liviu Bota. The Meeting is part of the Geneva Process, begun at the initiative of the Secretary-General and aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Mr. Ismail Cem, addressed the participants of the Meeting at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

The delegation of the Georgian side was led by Mr. Vazha Lordkipanidze, and the delegation of the Abkhaz side was led by Mr. Sergei Bagapsh. The delegations comprised prominent individuals from the sides, including representatives of the intelligentsia, directors of major industrial and agricultural enterprises, elders, military who have participated in the armed conflict, and others.

Representatives of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, the Organization for Security, and Cooperation in Europe, and the members of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General participated in and addressed the Meeting. The UNOMIG Chief Military Observer and the Executive Secretary of the Joint/Bilateral Coordination Commission for Practical Questions also addressed the Meeting.

The Meeting was convened on the basis of the Concluding Statement of the First Geneva Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, held from 17 to 19 November 1997, in which the sides agreed that progress toward strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means.

The Meeting focused primarily on the question of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and also on economic problems.

The sides agreed as follows:

1. Within one week to hold a special meeting of plenipotentiary representatives to address the issue of the exchange of hostages and prisoners.
2. To support and cooperate with the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG in conducting joint investigation of incidents which may represent a threat to stability in the conflict zone.
3. To revive the activities of the working groups within the framework of the Coordinating Council.

- a) To convene within one week Working Group I. It will consider measures to implement the agreements achieved by the sides regarding ensuring security along the entire line of the separation of forces.
 - b) To convene within one week Working Group II for the consideration and agreement of urgent measures regarding the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and the establishment of conditions for their safety. The Working Group will also hear information from the parties regarding the situation in the Gali region.
 - c) To convene within one week Working Group III. It will address the question of interaction with the Standing Working Group of the Joint Bilateral Coordination Commission for Practical Questions. This Standing Working Group will promote the establishment of economic ties between economic entities and draw up specific proposals and submit them for discussion by the Coordination Commission. It will also address projects which serve the interests of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, including those designed to ensure uninterrupted functioning of the Inguri dam and power plant, and also the restoration of films with assistance of UNDP and other international and national organizations. Financing of this Working Group will be implemented with support from UNDP.
4. To insure implementation of the commitment of the sides, provided for by the Protocol of 24 September 1998, on questions of stabilization of the situation along the line of separation of forces.
 5. To develop cooperation at the local level Istanbul Meeting participants will continue contacts to study possibilities for specific types of cooperation in various areas, in particular in the economic area.
 6. To organize meetings of political and public figures of the sides.
 7. To develop and establish mechanisms for the regular exchange of information, including, inter alia:
 - a) To exchange information between representatives of the mass media of the sides, including the exchange of television groups to create reports, including interviews with high-level individuals. These materials will be broadcast by the respective local television stations.
 - b) The Abkhaz side will be able to receive three hundreds copies of each issue of Svobodnaia Gruzii and the Georgian side will receive an equal number of copies of Respublica Abkhazia, on the basis of funding and logistical support from the United Nations.
 - c) Transmission from each side to the other of their respective press service reports will be facilitated by the United Nations.
 - d) To hold a meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in Tbilisi in July 1999, and in Pitsunda in August 1999, to exchange information.
 - e) To request the BBC to sponsor training courses for Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in London.

8. The law-enforcement organs of the two sides will exchange available information on any preparations for illegal acts and will consult on measures to be taken jointly to prevent them. Direct communication links should be utilized for this purpose.

9. Representatives of the respective Commissions for Missing-in-Action cases of the two sides will meet within one month, to review the situation. They will meet regularly within the framework of the Coordinating Council.

Implementation of the above agreed measures will be carried out within the framework of the Coordinating Council and through bilateral contacts. The United Nations will provide logistical support as necessary, in the implementation of these measures.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General will report to the Secretary-General of the UN, who will then inform the Security Council on the outcome of this Meeting.

The sides and all participants of this Meeting expressed to the government of Turkey their deepest gratitude for the invitation to convene a meeting in Istanbul, for the warm hospitality shown, and for its active role in the creation of an atmosphere that facilitated substantive and constructive results.

The participants of the Meeting took note of the information concerning the invitation from the government of Ukraine to hold the next Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence measures in Yalta.

Istanbul, 7–9 June 1999.

(Signed) V. Lordkipanidze

(Signed) S. Bagapsh

(Signed) L. Bota